



Sleep like a baby

Is your baby overtired? Watch out for these signs they're not getting enough shut-eye.

While casually chatting to another mother the other day, and organising my own baby to sleep in the stroller, the conversation inevitably turned to babies and sleep. This mother recounted what her now four-year-old was like as a baby. The endless days when he'd finally fall asleep in a rocker and she'd ever-so-gently move him to his cot... only to have him wake screaming and cry for hours.

She was convinced he knew when she was trying to move him and would wake and cry as a result. She would then have the difficult task of trying to soothe him to sleep again. Once again the rocker was her only salvation and once again he'd wake. Even if she didn't move him he'd wake at the slightest noise. All mums and dads can relate to this story and understand the exhaustion and frustration a crying and poorly sleeping baby creates.

What this mother didn't know, and what most parents don't know, is that she was dealing with an overtired baby. Her story illustrates all the symptoms of overtiredness. A baby who finds it hard to fall asleep and requires help nodding off by being held, rocked or even driven around in the car. A baby who wakes crying or screaming after a brief sleep. Overtired babies wake at the slightest movement or noise – a creaking door, when mum bumps the cot, the phone rings or the dog barks. And then, because they haven't had enough sleep, hours of crying follow.

Another telltale sign of an overtired baby is what I call 'Jeckyl and Hyde' behaviour. Your baby is happy and smiling one minute, then whingeing and complaining the next. Mum then starts to wonder if they're tired and need to go to sleep. Then your baby changes for the better and smiles and chats again so you think they're okay to stay up longer. This is a classic sign of overtiredness and can also be seen in older children. When you see this Jeckyl and Hyde behaviour it means your child needs to go to sleep as soon as possible. Don't delay!

A baby who sleeps well, on the other hand, should fall asleep within 5-10 minutes of being placed in their cot. They will sleep through all sorts of noises, for about two hours at a time, and wake happy. After being up for a short time parents need to be watching for their baby's signs of tiredness. Start a sleep routine and place your baby in their cot to sleep. Having a baby who puts themselves to sleep and sleeps well is achievable for everyone.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Psychologist and parent Nicole Pierotti is a baby sleep and parenting expert. After 15 years working with countless parents she can teach you how to have a happy baby. Call 4725 4699 or visit www.babysmiles.com.au for more information.